



COMMISSION ON CHILD CARE

March 30, 2018

The Honorable Hans Riemer
President, Montgomery County Council
100 Maryland Avenue, 6th Floor
Rockville, Maryland 20850

Dear President Riemer and Members of the County Council:

The Commission on Child Care (CCC) advises the County Executive and County Council on the development, implementation, and effectiveness of government policies, programs, and services that enhance community support for quality, affordable and accessible child care. We appreciate the opportunity to provide input to the Council around areas of critical importance to the lives of Montgomery County's youngest citizens and their families.

Through this letter, the CCC would like to urge Montgomery County to further support the promotion of school readiness by focusing on the mental health needs of children birth through five years old.

Early childhood mental health is the developing capacity of a child to experience, regulate and express emotions; to form close and secure relationships; and to explore the environment and learn, all in the context of family, community, and cultural expectations for young children. Scientific evidence and practical experiences tell us that the earliest years are incredibly significant, perhaps the most significant, to fostering healthy social and emotional development. Evidence has demonstrated that programs and services that support young children and their families can have a significant impact on improving social and emotional outcomes for young children.

"Social, emotional, and behavioral problems are now among the top five chronic disabilities affecting children under the age of 18 in the United States"ⁱ. Specifically for infants and toddlers, reported rates of children being identified for social-emotional needs and services ranging from 11% to 26% with higher numbers occurring as the number of child and family risk factors roseⁱⁱ. This is concerning because of the critical role attachment plays in children's healthy social-emotional development. Unlike adults, young children have a limited repertoire of responses to stress and traumaⁱⁱⁱ. When a young child's social-emotional development does not proceed in a healthy way, that child will have a difficult time benefiting from early learning experiences^{iv}. When young children exhibit these challenging behaviors, they are more likely to be rejected by their peers and teachers, perform poorly in school and are at a greater risk for dropping out of school in the later years and engaging in delinquent acts^v.

Department of Health and Human Services

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The price of inaction is enormous in both social and economic terms. Many children with mental health challenges enter school behind, stay behind, and are often referred to special education or held back a grade as a result. Thus, the lack of funding for mental health support in the early years actually results in a heavy, unnecessary financial burden for the school system in the long-term. Over the course of a student's K-12 education, Montgomery County will spend nearly \$100,000 more on each special education student than in regular education.

Currently, funding for the Early Childhood Mental Health (ECMH) Consultation Project carries the Department of Health and Human Services through approximately March of each year, leaving at least 25% of the need unaddressed. In addition, while the program serves at least 50 children per year, the full need in the County may not be known, because of the nature of the program and needs of child care programs DHHS does not employ a waitlist for ECMH. We implore the Council to acknowledge the importance of addressing young children's mental health – and believe these statistics and potential outcomes create urgency for the County Council to act now to increase funding for early childhood mental health services in Montgomery County.

Thank you for your time, service and consideration.

Sincerely,



Greg Smith
Chair

ⁱ Halfon et al, 2012

ⁱⁱ American Academy of Pediatrics, 2012, Brown et al, 2012, Weitzman et al, 2013, and Squires et al, 2015

ⁱⁱⁱ Zero To Three Fact Sheet

^{iv} Zero To Three Fact Sheet

^v Promoting Well Being of Children and Families, Knitzer